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Victory for Fair Maps!

Wisconsin Counties Association urges an end to gerrymandering in Wis!

WISCONSIN DELLS—In an indication that the tide has turned against gerrymandering in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Counties Association urged the legislature to adopt nonpartisan redistricting.

On Sunday, at its annual conference, which was held this year at the Kalahari Resorts in the Wisconsin Dells, the Wisconsin Counties Association passed a resolution that states: “Redistricting to achieve partisan gains is improper, whether it is done by Republicans or Democrats.”

It insisted upon “the creation of a nonpartisan procedure for the preparation of legislative and Congressional redistricting plans.”

And it spelled out some criteria for doing this, which would prohibit “the consideration of voting patterns, party information, and incumbents’ residence information or demographic information in drawing the maps, except as necessary to ensure minority participation as required by the U.S. Constitution.”

“This vote by the Wisconsin Counties Association sends a powerful message, loud and clear, to the lawmakers in Madison that local officials and our constituents are sick and tired of the partisan hanky-panky,” says Hans Breitenmoser, a member of the Lincoln County Board, who was instrumental in promoting this resolution. “We want fair maps and a transparent process.”

The adoption of this resolution by the Wisconsin Counties Association follows a remarkable county-by-county call for nonpartisan redistricting. Already, just this year, 24 counties have passed such resolutions, lifting the total number of counties that are on board to 30, which account for more than half of the population of the state.

“This issue has really taken off,” says Anna Dvorak, a leader of the Citizen Action Organizing Cooperative. “The citizens of Wisconsin want fair representation. They don’t want the party that happens to be in power to be able to rig the maps so they stay in power indefinitely. That’s not the Wisconsin way.”

The effort to push these resolutions at the county level was spurred on by an ad-hoc group called Fair Maps Wisconsin, which consists of such groups as Citizen Action Organizing Cooperatives, Common Cause in Wisconsin, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Wisconsin Fair Elections Project, and Wisconsin Voices, among others.

The Fair Maps Coalition is promoting the so-called “Iowa Model,” where career civil servants draw the maps with specific criteria prohibiting the use of demographic data for partisan purposes.

“Iowa has had nonpartisan redistricting for more than 35 years now,” says Matt Rothschild, executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign. “If Iowa can do it, so can we.”

Attention to the issue of fair maps in Wisconsin gained momentum after Wisconsin’s redistricting maps were declared unconstitutional by a panel of federal judges last November. That case is before the U.S. Supreme Court this term, with oral arguments set for October 3.

“No matter which way the Supreme Court rules, we still need to change the process,” says Andrea Kaminski, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin. “Elected officials should not be able to pick and choose their voters. It should be the other way around.”